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Impact of cultural factors and gender roles on maternal parenting in India

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To analyse the role of cultural factors and gender roles on maternal parenting in India

Study design: Self report questionnaire

Methodology: Sixty women in the age range of 35-73 reported their response through a self-report questionnaire

Results: Majority of the women who participated in the survey strongly or moderately agreed that Indian culture does play a significant role in mothers labour participation. Majority also agreed that they are unemployed in-order to take care of family-an important gender role in India.

Conclusion: results of the current study reveal that Indian culture and gender roles have played a significant role in the level of maternal employment

Keywords: Parenting, Maternal Employment

I. INTRODUCTION

Parenting styles represent the actions and behaviors of parents towards their children and the emotional mind frame it forms. Four main types of parenting styles have been recognized worldwide which include: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful, based on the factors of demand and response by the parent. When it comes to parenting in India, statistics by International Labour organization showcase, female labor force participation fell from 34.1 per cent in 1999-00 to 27.2 per cent in 2011-12 (Verick, 2014) and 32.8 percent during 2021-22 as per annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports (PIB Delhi, 2023). This illustrates the reduction in women participation in labour force, including mothers.

In India, the cultural factors which form gender roles and parenting techniques are different than that found globally due to traditions followed in India. As per the World Bank, the female labour participation rate in India is significantly lower as compared to global estimates. (World Bank, 2022) A Niti Aayog report states that women in India do 9.8 times more unpaid work as compared to men in comparison to the global average of 2.6.

The aim of this research paper is to investigate the factors related to Indian culture, history and gender roles on their impact on Maternal employment and parenting.

Root cause

Prior to independence, the status of women and their significance in Indian society exponentially decreased due to patriarchal oppression. More than lack of resources and access to jobs, the deep-rooted causes for low labour participation can be explained from the lack of decision making power given to women, inconspicuousness and inequality.

Traditional Hindu rituals like Sati, where a widow would commit suicide or was killed after her husband's death show the gender inequality maintained previously in Hindu culture and how it reflects the image people had of women and their worth in life, once their husband died. (Dhillon, Widow burning: The burning issue of Colonial Britain and India)

Traditionally, families also expected men to provide emotional and financial support which led to extreme preference toward male child as compared to a female child.

As per family rituals in India, once a daughter is married, she moves to her in-law's house and is no more supposed to take care of her own parents. Due to this, families would rather have a son, who would take care of them. This led to female feticide being common practice in India.

An article published in 2022 states that male children are still given preference over female children. Sons are seen as an investment and daughters are seen as a liability. (Nag Bhowmick, 2022)

II. HYPOTHESIS

We hypothesise that, due to the established cultural norms, there exists low female labour participation rates in India which translates into females having more time to spend towards their family and children. This can lead to extensively close relationships between the child and parent, which can sometimes turn overbearing and controlling. This research paper aims to establish a connection between Indian culture and gender roles as a cause for low levels of maternal employment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The use of primary research involves a self-report- questionnaire with a sample size of 60 females in the age range of 35 to 73 who had been approached through opportunity sampling. They were asked eight close ended questions through an online mode. Two of the questions were 5 point linear scales and the remaining questions were multiple choice questions.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out the beliefs of urban Indian mothers, whether employed or unemployed, on how maternal employment is affected by Indian culture and its impact on parenting style especially in terms of attention given to adolescents.

IV. RESULTS

What is your current employment status?

60 responses

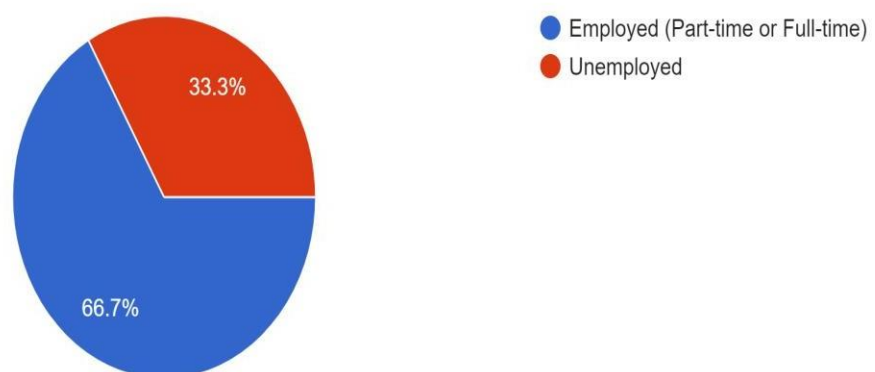


Fig 1: Pie chart showing that 33.3% of the women who participated in the study were unemployed while 66.7% were employed. Out of the 60 women who participated in the study, 33.3% were unemployed as shown in Fig 1 whereas 66.7% were employed. In numerical form, 20 of the 60 participants were unemployed and 40 were employed.

'Indian culture plays a role in why mothers work or stay as housewives'

60 responses

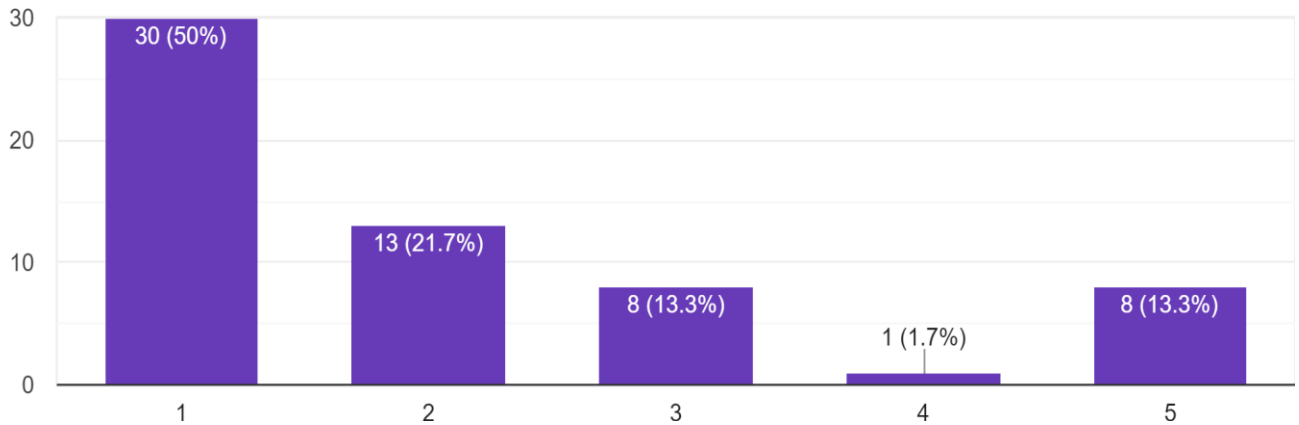


Fig 2: A bar graph showcasing that 50% of the women enrolled in the study completely agree that Indian culture plays a role in a mother's employment status, 21.7% slightly agree. 13.3% neither agree nor disagree and 13.3% strongly disagree

When it comes to the role played by Indian culture on a mother's employment status, 30 of the 60 participants strongly agreed that it plays a significant role and 43 agreed that it overall plays a role. Whereas, 8 participants completely disagreed with the statement that Indian culture plays a role is why mothers work or stay as housewife. The range between the participants completely agreeing and completely disagreeing is 22 (36.7%)

If you are currently unemployed, is it because you want to take care of your family and children? (not required to be answered by employed mothers)

28 responses

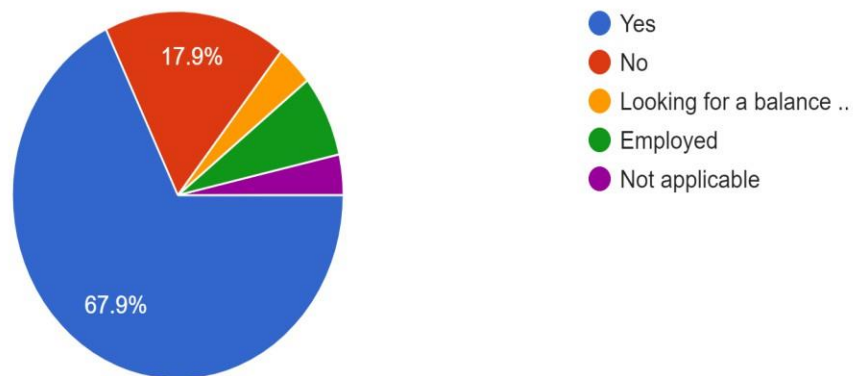


Fig 3: Pie chart illustrating 67.9% of the women who are currently unemployed because of their responsibility toward their family and children and 17.9% were unemployed due to other reasons.

28 out of 60 participants answered this non- required question as illustrated in Fig 3. 19 out of 28 participants are unemployed due to their priority towards family and children where as only 5 said that their unemployment is not related to their family.

Does your family encourage you to pursue a career?

60 responses

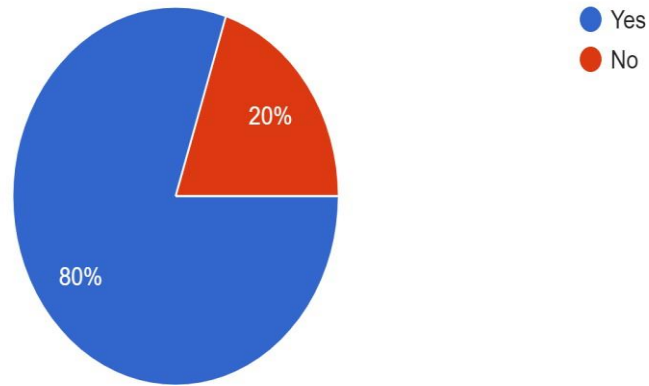


Fig 4: A pie chart showcasing that 20% of the participants families do not encourage them to pursue a career whereas, 80% of the participants do encourage them pursuing a career

The results in Fig 4 show that 12 of the 60 participants are part of a family where they are not even encouraged to pursue a professional career where four-fifth of the participants have families that encourage them to seek jobs. As compared to the results in Fig 1, 8 out of 20 of the unemployed participants in this study are not allowed to work.

'Indian culture and gender roles discourage mothers from seeking work, and encourages men to work'

60 responses

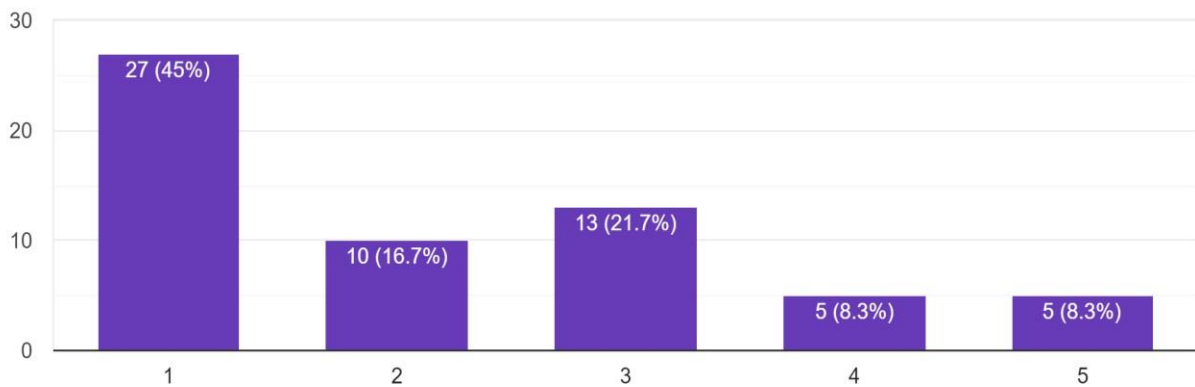


Fig 5: 45% percent of participants completely agree that Indian culture and gender roles discourage mothers from seeking job opportunities and in turn, encourage males.

27 out of 60 of the females completely agreed and 37 of them completely or slightly agreed that gender roles in the Indian culture encourage men to work as per Fig 5. 13 of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed and 10 slightly or completely disagreed. The range between the number of participants who completely agreed and completely disagreed is 22 (36.7%)

How involved are you in your child's education and daily life activities?

60 responses

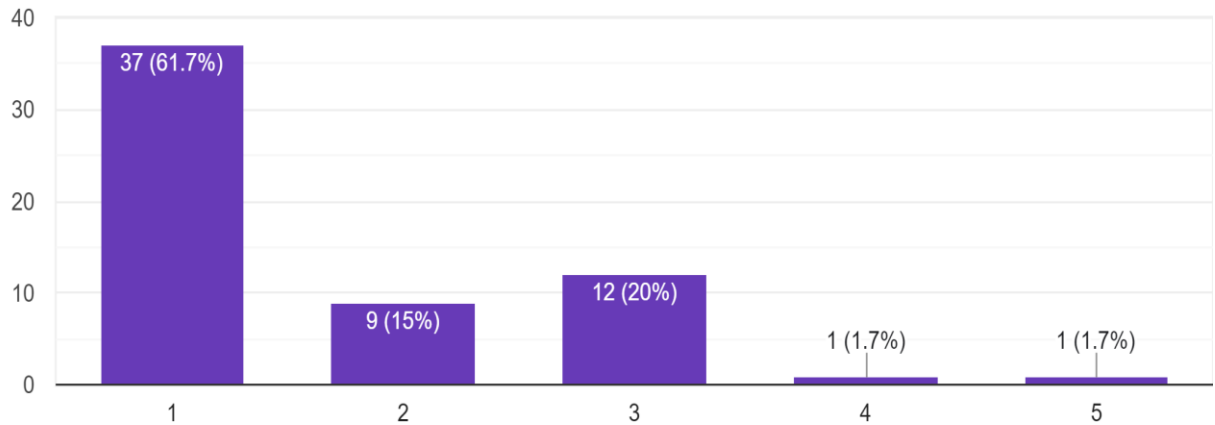


Fig 6: Bar chart showing that 61.7% women are completely invested in their child's social life, education and classes. 15% are moderately invested and 20% are slightly invested. 1.7% and moderately uninvolved and 1.7% and completely uninvolved.

Fig 6 shows that 42 out of the 60 participants are completely or moderately involved in all their child's activities including social life, all their school tests, exams and minor details like subject selections and information on teachers. 12 of the women are slightly involved with their child's daily life.

Do you think stay at home moms give better attention to their children?

60 responses

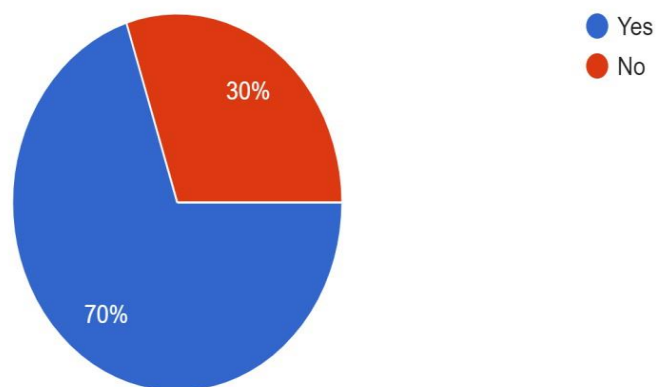


Fig 7: 70% participants agree that unemployed stay-at-home mothers give better attention to their children whereas, 30% of the participants disagree

Fig 7 shows that 42 out of 60 participants believe that stay at home mothers who are unemployed give better attention to their children. 18 of the women disagree with the statement and rather believe that stay at home mothers do not necessarily give better attention.

'Being a stay-at-home mom means your child will perform better academically'

60 responses

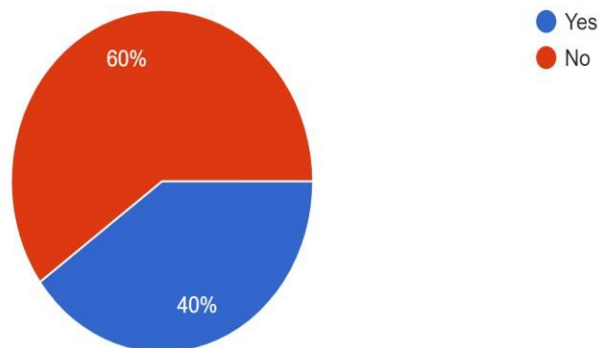


Fig 8: Illustrates that 40% of the participants agreed to the statement stating adolescents of stay-at-home mothers will perform better academically and 60% disagreed

24 out of 60 of the mothers enrolled in this study agreed that adolescents would perform better academically if their mother was a stay-at-home mom rather than in formal paid employment as shown by Fig 8. Whereas, 36 of the participants disagree with the statement.

The range is of 12 participants (20%)

V. DISCUSSION

Cultures vary in different parts of the world thus affecting lifestyles and employment patterns. India, being a culturally diverse country, which is in the forefront of technological advancements over last four to five decades, is going through a paradigm shift in its cultural ecosystem. This study aims at understanding the role of traditional Indian cultural ideologies in maternal employment and its impact on parenting.

While, 71.7% of the women strongly or moderately agreed that Indian culture does play a significant role in mothers labour participation, 67.9% of the women agreed that they are unemployed in-order to take care of family- an important gender role in India. This is supported by views of traditionalists who view Indian families to have gender orientated power roles with women as housewives and men as workers (Shameer, 2021).

Twenty percent of the participants also shared that their families do not encourage them to pursue a career. This indicates that one-fifth of the households in metropolitan cities of India still have conservative feelings regarding women employment and do not support mothers who seek job opportunities. This piece of information showcases how traditions and viewpoints of Indians differ from the world views. When taking into consideration a cross country analysis, in 2022- 61.25% of females were part of the labour force as compared to 24% in India, in the same year. 61.7 % participants agreed that Indian culture and gender roles discourage mothers from working and encourage men towards job opportunities. A previous survey on 29,999 Indian adults also illustrated that 56% of the sample believed that in case of a shortage of jobs, men have more right to a job.

The underlying cultural reasoning for this is the family traditions that follow the ideology of women as housewife and norms supporting that childcare is only a mother's responsibility. (Evans & Sahgal, 2022). While majority of the study participants agree that unemployed mothers can pay better attention to their children, majority did not agree that children of unemployed mothers perform better academically. Further, while majority of the study participants were employed, majority also were completely involved in their child's academic and life-care activities. The research method utilised for primary research is a questionnaire which collected only quantitative data. The sampling technique used was opportunity sampling to approach 60 female participants.

When it comes to ethics, the questionnaire responses were taken anonymously in order to maintain confidentiality of all the participants. This was done by neither asking for their name nor collecting their email id through the Google form.

The aim of the study was not explicitly revealed however, they were not lied to, either or to prevent deception. Their privacy had been maintained and filling the form was an optional work with no external incentive. This ensures that no participant felt forced to carry out the task. The questions were closed ended and their nature ensured that it does not cause any psychological harm. It

occurred online, so chances of physical harm were negligible. However, due to the questionnaire being filled online, it was difficult to observe participants and note their body language. The research method being a self-report can lead to social desirability bias where the participants answered according to what they think is socially accepted rather than what they truly believe. In Fig 6, The question 'How involved are you in your child's daily life' the participants might feel saying 'completely involved' is more socially acceptable and therefore answer accordingly.

When taking into consideration contradictory views, it can be hypothesised that cultural factors and gender roles do not play a role in the level of maternal employment. It can be considered that the correlation is not present and the two factors are far-fetched and not related. However, even though the traditional views on women are very different from current views, culture is an evolutionary factor which is passed on from generation to generation. This helps explain why views on women in India have originated from a highly conservative ideology yet, do affect society till date. Fig 2 supports this claim by showing that 43 out of 60 women completely or slightly agree that Indian culture does affect maternal employment. So, the contradictory view is highly unlikely.

VI. CONCLUSION

To conclude, results of the current study reveal that Indian culture and gender roles have played a significant role in the level of maternal employment. Further, although majority (66.7%) of women in urban areas of India are employed majority participants were completely involved in their child's daily activities.

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